

were in political drift; government was completely discredited. And I said, "Look, give me a chance. I've got some new ideas to create opportunity, to increase responsibility among our citizens, to build a community of America." And we set about changing. Meanwhile, America was changing.

The day I took office as President there were only 50 websites on the Internet in the whole world, 50. That's how much we've changed. So yes, we've got the strongest economy in history. And yes, we're paying off the debt instead of being in debt. But we also have cut our welfare rolls in half. We've got the lowest crime rate in 30 years. We've got the lowest poverty rate in 30 years. We've reversed this wage inequality. All groups are growing. A couple of million children have been moved out of poverty. The air is cleaner. The water is cleaner. We set aside more land to protect it than any other administration except those of Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt.

So the whole Nation has been transformed. We literally have prepared the country for another century. If you compare it from now to then; instead of a distressed economy, you've got a booming economy. Instead of a divided society, you've got the social problems being solved. And instead of political drift and discrediting of government, we've got the smallest Government in 37 years, and it's actually doing things for people, empowering people.

So I think that I have been fortunate enough to serve as President at a time of dramatic trans-

formation, when we really have—in the metaphor I used in 1996—built a bridge to the future. And now the American people are going to have to decide how they want to walk over it.

President's New York Residence

Mr. Gumbel. Final note. If my research is correct, you sign papers next week, final papers, on the house in Chappaqua. Do you happen to know what's the closest golf course to your house in Chappaqua?

The President. I don't, no.

Mr. Gumbel. Whippoorwill Country Club in Armonk. Do you know who is a member there?

The President. Are you?

Mr. Gumbel. Yes, sir.

The President. I would be happy to be your guest any time. I'm easy about that.

Mr. Gumbel. Mr. President, safe travels.

The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview was videotaped at 4:08 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast on November 1. In his remarks, the President referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Philadelphia mayoral candidate John F. Street; and former Senators Bill Bradley and Bob Dole. A portion of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks on the EgyptAir Flight 990 Aircraft Tragedy and the Budget and an Exchange With Reporters

October 31, 1999

The President. Good afternoon. Before I leave for Oslo, I would like to make a few comments. First, I want to say, as I did earlier today, how deeply saddened I am over the disappearance of EgyptAir flight 990 early this morning off the coast of Massachusetts.

We know there has been a loss of life. The Coast Guard, supported by the Navy, is conducting extensive search and rescue operations in the area. The effort will continue for as long as necessary. We are also working with Egyptian

authorities, and I spoke earlier with President Mubarak of Egypt today to express my condolences and to assure him that we would be working together closely until this matter is resolved.

We do not know what caused this tragedy, but we will devote every necessary resource so that we can understand exactly what happened. At this moment, the thoughts and prayers of all our people should be with the families of the passengers and crew of flight 990 from the

United States and other places throughout the world.

In a few minutes, I will leave for Norway, where leaders will gather to honor the memory of one of the great heroes of this century, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. We will honor him by not only remembering his life but by pursuing his vision of a peaceful Middle East.

I will meet with Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat, who are moving forward on an ambitious agenda to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. There are tremendous challenges ahead. I will do everything I can to help, because peace in the Middle East is strongly in the interest of the American people. And we have been working on it on a bipartisan basis for several years now.

Now, before I leave, I also want to say just a few words about the budget debate here in Washington and how that debate may affect another matter of great interest to our people, the education of our children.

This is now the seventh budget season I have been through as President. Each and every time, the Vice President and I have insisted that Congress produce budgets that live within our means while living up to the values of the American people. There is no greater value than education, especially in this information age. So even as we have reduced the size of Government to its smallest size in 37 years, we have nearly doubled our investment in education and training.

We have turned deficits into surpluses. We have sparked an economic expansion because of it, that come February will be the longest in American history. But we have not stopped increasing our investment and targeting our investment to higher standards and higher quality education.

Last fall we took another very important step. We reached an agreement with Congress to help States and school districts begin to hire 100,000 new teachers, new high-quality teachers that were well trained, to reduce class size in the early grades. The need for this was obvious. School enrollments are exploding; they are already the largest in history. And record numbers of our teachers soon will be retiring. Moreover, the research is clear that students learn more in classes with smaller, quality teachers.

Today we've learned about a new report indicating that our class reduction initiative already is producing results. Moments ago, I was briefed

by the gentleman here to my left, Mike Casserly, the executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, on the council's just completed survey of 40 of the Nation's largest school districts.

The survey shows that our class size reduction initiative has so far done precisely what we said it would. It has put more teachers in the classroom and increased training for those already there, with a minimum of red-tape and bureaucracy. The report shows that these school districts have not only hired over 3,500 well-trained teachers, but they have hired them for hard to fill positions that add the greatest impact, including teaching reading, math, and special education.

I'm not surprised by these results. Every time I've visited a school in recent months, teachers, principals, parents, administrators all have complimented, even raved about our class size reduction initiative.

This report confirms that this targeted effort to hire more teachers is what local schools need and want. Last fall the congressional Republicans agreed to support this proposal. Many of them went home in the election seasons and enthusiastically shared the credit for it, which they were then entitled to do. I know that some of them even ran ads touting this idea as they embraced it.

Now, suddenly, the Republican majority has changed its mind. And this week Congress will consider a labor and education budget bill that doesn't commit to hiring 100,000 new quality teachers. In fact, it reverses the targeted funding for the first installment of 30,000 that we passed last time. Nor does it put a dime into our effort to demand accountability for results by helping States and school districts to turn around or shut down their lowest performing schools.

Moreover, it makes mindless across-the-board cuts in everything from education to health to safety. If that bill passes, I will veto it. I don't think the proper response to our education challenge is fewer teachers, no accountability, and across-the-board cuts in education.

I want to hire 100,000 more teachers, 50,000 more community police to build on the effort that has given us the lowest crime rate in 30 years. I want to protect the environment and invest in education strategies that work.

Let me also reemphasize something. Many of those who say they don't want to target this money for hiring more teachers, say the money

is needed to improve the quality of the existing teaching force. These 40 school districts I just mentioned not only hired over 3,500 new teachers; they gave professional development to over 22,000 teachers to improve their skills in the classroom.

Our bill provides that money can be used to train existing teachers, and money can be used for recruitment as well as for salaries. In other words, this fund is flexible where it needs to be flexible but targeted where it needs to be targeted. This report shows conclusively that what we did in 1998, as Republicans and Democrats alike, was right. It shows that the Members of Congress in the Republican Party who ran ads in 1998 complimenting themselves for the 100,000 teacher initiative were right then, and they shouldn't be changing their mind now.

So once again, I ask Congress to put partisanship aside, read this report, and work with me to reduce class size, increase quality in teaching, and increase performance in our schools. We should be funding education strategies that work.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Casserly.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you optimistic about Oslo?

The President. Well, yes I am, based on the work that Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat have done already. You know, they've now opened the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza. They're working very closely together on security arrangements.

But when the Oslo accords were made at the end—the very, very end of 1992, the people

who put them together and the leaders who ratified them were quite smart. They left certain issues to be decided at the end, the so-called final status issues. They left them to the end because they're the hardest.

And so now it's come time to make the hard decisions. This will be difficult for both sides. But I believe that they're well aware of what the options are, and I don't believe they'll get much easier with the passage of time. So I think it's very important that the United States do whatever we can to create the conditions and provide the support necessary for these people to come together and do what they genuinely want to do. And so yes, I'm hopeful. I don't expect that we'll announce the resolution of all the final status issues at Oslo, but I do think that we'll be moving the process right along.

Effect of EgyptAir Flight 990 Aircraft Tragedy on Oslo Talks

Q. Mr. President, are you worried that the EgyptAir crash will overshadow the Oslo trip?

The President. Based on what I now know and my conversation with President Mubarak, based on what I now know, I do not believe that, no. I have no reason to believe that there is any element involved in this which would overshadow or shadow the work of peace.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:45 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House prior to departure for Oslo, Norway. In his remarks, he referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

Exchange With Reporters in Oslo, Norway November 1, 1999

Middle East Peace Process

Q. What is your hope for the peace process?

The President. Well, first of all, I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Government, and the people of Norway for hosting this meeting. I think it's coming at a good time. I believe that Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat want to continue the peace process. And we

are now to the point where the really difficult decisions lie ahead. So coming back to Oslo, where the Oslo accords were born, coming here to honor the memory of Yitzhak Rabin, who gave his life for this peace process, it's a good thing to do.

And so we're hopeful that we'll make some progress. And we'll see, and probably the less we say about it in public, the more likely we